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## **The Color of Pomegranates: The Director's Cut**

Capsule by Jonathan Rosenbaum

*From the Chicago Reader*

The late Sergei Paradjanov's greatest film, a mystical and historical mosaic about the life, work, and inner world of the 18th-century Armenian poet Sayat Nova, was previously available only in the ethnically "dry-cleaned" Russian version—recut and somewhat reorganized by Sergei Yutkevich, with chapter headings added to clarify the content for Russian viewers. This superior 1969 version of the film, found in an Armenian studio in the early 90s, shouldn't be regarded as definitive (some of the material from the Yutkevich cut is missing), but it's certainly the finest we have and may ever have: some shots and sequences are new, some are positioned differently, and, of particular advantage to Western viewers, much more of the poetry is subtitled. (Oddly enough, it's hard to tell why the "new" shots were censored.) In both versions the striking use of tableaulike frames recalls the shallow space of movies made roughly a century ago, while the gorgeous uses of color and the wild poetic conceits seem to derive from some utopian cinema of the future, at once "difficult" and immediate, cryptic and ravishing. This is essential viewing.

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Capsule by Pat Graham

*From the Chicago Reader*

Sergei Paradjanov's stylized tribute to Armenian poet and folk hero Sayat Nova proceeds in the manner of a grave, arcane rite, as if the flattened figures of some ancient pre-Renaissance fresco had miraculously been brought to life. For its oblique and somewhat abstract evocation of "reactionary" nationalist and religious sentiment, the film was banned in Russia, and its director was subsequently sentenced to six years of hard labor in a prison camp. Maybe the authorities had a point: the film is reactionary, though more in an aesthetic than a political sense. The antiquated tableau styling, frozen and evocative, harks back to Melies, though with the kind of backward-turning fertility that opens out and animates rather than embalms. It's a strange, visionary work, highly formal and not easy of access, but compelling in a way that's almost impossible to describe (1969).